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UNCLAS KINSHASA 000056

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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: FARDC-MAI MAI FIGHTING FORCES 30,000 TO FLEE

REF: A. 05 KINSHASA 1940

1B. 05 KINSHASA 2028

11. (SBU) Despite recent media reports of up to 125,000 new internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northern Katanga province, the number of people who have fled their homes since mid-November is actually about 30,000. According to Anne Edgerton, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) chief in Kalemie, around 76,000 Kantangans were internally displaced prior to the fighting that broke out in November. An additional 16,000 were displaced due to Mai Mai attacks during October, shortly before the start of Congolese army (FARDC) action against militia members. Per OCHA, the current total IDP population in Katanga province as of January 9 is 121,990.

12. (SBU) The FARDC Sixth Military Region began operations against Mai Mai militia in northern Katanga in November 2005 (reflets). The operations began around the town of Dubia, known to be the base of renegade leader Gedeon Kyungu. The FARDC claimed to have gained back all villages previously occupied by Gedeon and his troops by the end of 2005. They were also holding 150 prisoners near Dubia including, reportedly, one of Gedeon's lieutenants. Gedeon is reported by locals as openly operating in the region, despite FARDC claims that he cannot be located. Recent credible reports from Katanga suggest that Gedeon and his followers are currently responsible for armed attacks against civilians near Mufunga.

13. (SBU) Humanitarian conditions, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG) and OCHA, are deplorable. The lack of infrastructure, the large existing IDP population, and the disruption of food distribution systems by military operations have created a crisis situation. Aid agencies have been unable to reach many people affected in the north and center of the province, and they fear that IDP numbers could be higher than reported. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Kinshasa, an emergency response team from Geneva will be sent to the region within the next week in order to verify IDP numbers and to determine how to provide assistance more broadly. (Note: The UNHCR has recently broadened its mission in the DRC to include internally displaced persons. End note.)

14. (SBU) Comment: Unfortunately, civilian displacements have resulted from all military operations targeting armed militia groups in the east. Considering the seriousness of the OCHA and ICG reports, the UNHCR response team's cannot arrive too soon. End comment.

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